World History (HONORS) Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Battle of Roncevaux Pass**

1. Make of flowchart of the events that caused the Battle of Roncevaux, as described in this reading. As a group, write your flowchart on the white board, but also be sure to record it for yourself!

On 15 August 778, one of the most famous battles of the Charlemagne era took place. It pitted his Frankish forces against marauding Basque guerrillas, and for its heroism and brutality has passed into the realm of legend.   
  
The Battle of Roncevaux, named after the Pyrenean pass where it was fought, arose from the ongoing thirst for territorial gain that occupied the various tribes of continental Europe in the Middle Ages. It was the result of an incendiary concoction of misfiring diplomacy, political manoeuvring, and revenge.   
  
In 777, Charlemagne was courted by Sulaiman Ibn al-Arabi, the wali, or governor, of Barcelona. Al-Arabi was keen to form an alliance with Charlemagne, in the hope that such a powerful ally would protect him from invasion. He assured Charlemagne that if the Frankish armies crossed the Pyrenees, they would meet with little resistance and could make considerable gains.   
  
Charlemagne accepted the enticing offer, and marched into the Iberian Peninsula in early 778. His progress, as promised, was swift, and by the spring he had taken the strategically important city of Pamplona. His army continued south, intent on capturing the jewel in the crown, the city of Zaragoza. However, when Charlemagne reached the city his progress was unexpectedly halted. The city governor, Hussain Ibn al-Ansari was in no mood to submit, and vowed to repel any Frankish invasion.   
  
After a tense standoff, during which Charlemagne laid siege to Zaragoza, a deal was eventually struck: Al-Ansari offered a substantial payment of gold, and the release of several prisoners, in return for a Frankish withdrawal. Charlemagne, pleased of an excuse to return to France where a Saxon rebellion was threatened, accepted the deal, and readied his forces for the march northwards.   
  
During the retreat, Charlemagne ordered that the fortifications of Pamplona be destroyed, reducing the threat of it being used as a base to attack the Franks. This antagonised the local population, and can be viewed as a possible cause of the battle the followed.   
  
On the night of 15 August, Charlemagne's army found itself deep in the Pyrenees, stretched out in a long column as it negotiated the narrow Roncevaux Pass. A rearguard, commanded by Roland, one of Charlemagne's most trusted military leaders, was tasked with keeping watch for potential enemies. However, notwithstanding the superior strength of the Franks, the rearguard came under surprise attack, and the Battle of Roncevaux commenced.   
  
It is probable that the attackers consisted of several Basque tribes aggrieved at their treatment during the Frankish invasion. They were familiar with the mountainous terrain, and despite military inferiority, inflicted considerable losses on the exposed rearguard, as well as plundering the gold that had been taken from Zaragoza. Although suffering severe losses, the rearguard, under Roland's command, managed eventually to repel the Basque attackers, allowing Charlemagne to return to France and ensuring the bulk of the Frankish army remained unscathed.   
  
The exploits of Roland, who later died of injuries sustained during battle, were popularised in the 10th century, with the appearance of *The Song of Roland*, an epic poem that told of the commander's heroic last stand. It is the earliest surviving example of French literature, and although highly romanticised and historically inaccurate, cemented the legendary status of the battle and became a significant influence on early European literature. 

Source:

"This Day in History - August 15, 778 - Battle of Roncevaux Pass." *This Day in History - August 15, 778 - Battle of Roncevaux Pass*. N.p., 30 Oct. 2014. Web. 29 Oct. 2014.